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AMAR CHITRA KATHA

No. 377 Rs. 5/-

Mahabharata-25

The Pandavas at Virata's Palace

Sri Vidyabharathi Book Centre, Sringeri

Amar Chitra Katha
No. 377, March 15, 1987

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Veda Vyasa's Epic on the Bharata race was first recited in public by his disciple Vaishampayana at the behest of the ageless seer Vyasa himself.

The recital took place in the august presence of King Janamejaya—great grandson of Vyasa—and the many learned sages who had assembled for Janamejaya's Sarpa Satra (a 12-year-long snake sacrifice).

The twenty-fourth session of our rendering of the Mahabharata described how the Pandavas spent the twelfth year of their exile in the forest of Kamyaka. King Jayadratha of Sindhu, while passing through the forest, chanced to see Draupadi alone and abducted her. She was rescued by the Pandavas who humiliated Jayadratha by shaving off his head. Then the Pandavas had an encounter with Yama who appeared in the form of a Yaksha. By earning his appreciation Yudhishthira obtained useful boons including one that would help the Pandavas spend the thirteenth year of their exile unrecognised by anyone. And the twelfth year of the exile ended peacefully.

*

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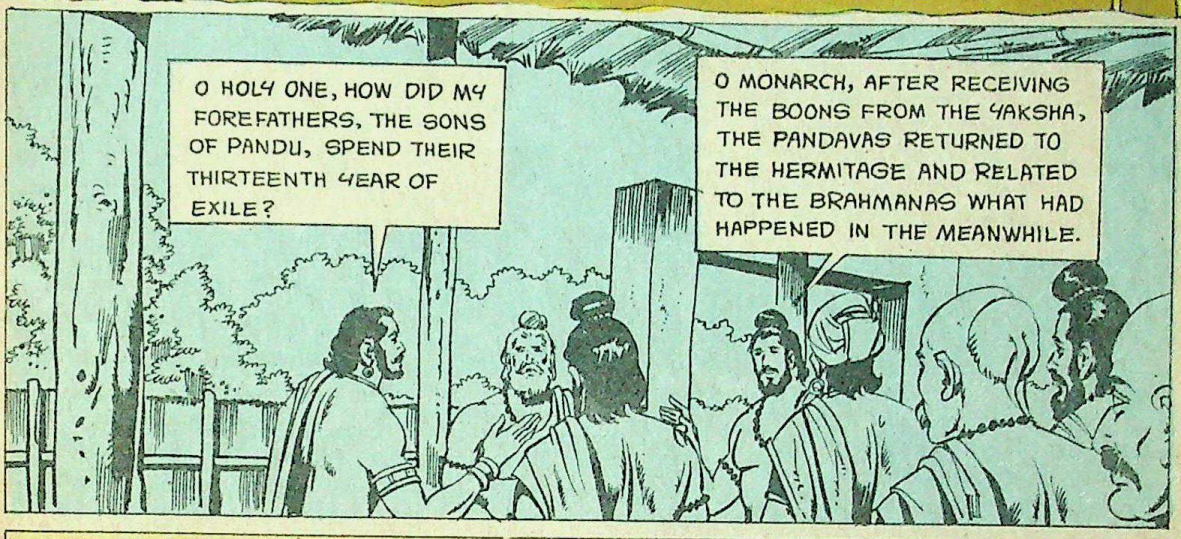
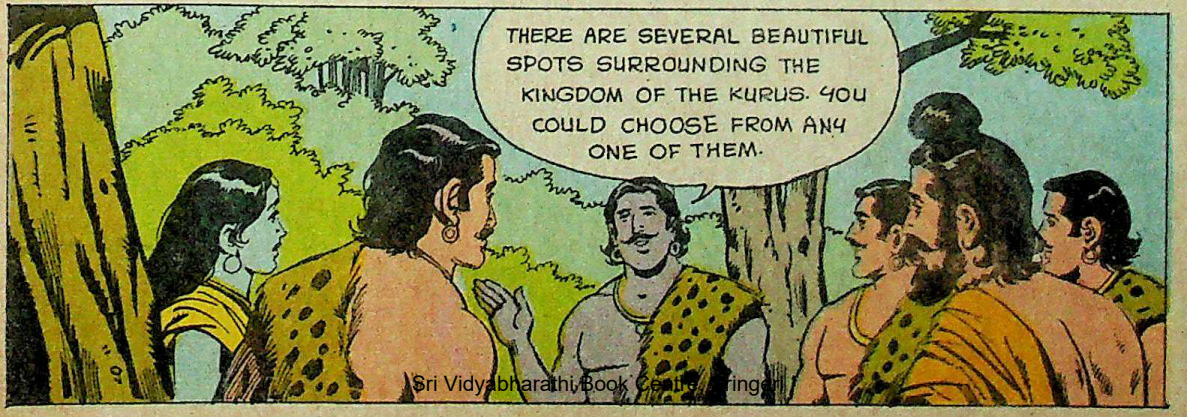
THE PANDAVAS AT VIRATA'S PALACE





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"YUDHISHTHIRA REPLIED —

ARJUNA, IT IS TRUE THAT BECAUSE OF THE YAKSHA'S BOON OUR DISGUISE WILL NOT BE DISCOVERED. BUT WE MUST SELECT A SPOT WHERE WE COULD LIVE FREE FROM FEAR AND WITHOUT BEING EXPOSED.

LET US GO TO THE KINGDOM OF THE AGED MATSYA KING, VIRATA. HE IS POWERFUL, VIRTUOUS, CHARITABLE AND WISHES WELL OF US.

WE COULD DISGUISE OURSELVES AND ENTER HIS SERVICE IN DIFFERENT CAPACITIES.

ARJUNA ASKED —

O VIRTUOUS ONE, YOU ARE MILD AND MODEST. IN WHAT MANNER DO YOU PROPOSE TO DISGUISE YOURSELF?

I SHALL PRESENT MYSELF AS A BRAHMANA WITH THE NAME KANKA, SKILLED IN DICE AND OTHER GAMES. I WILL TRY TO BECOME ONE OF THE COURTIERS OF KING VIRATA.

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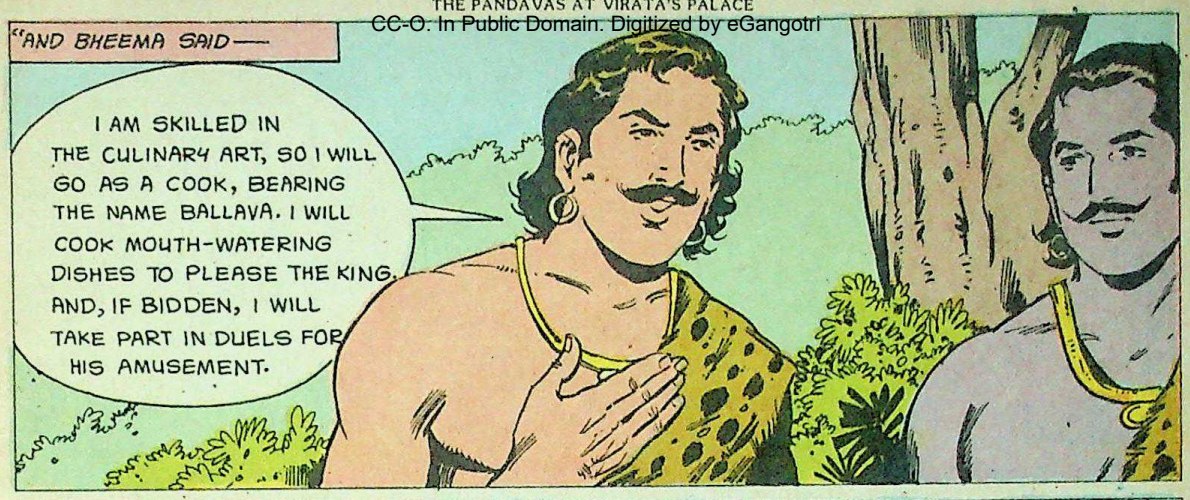

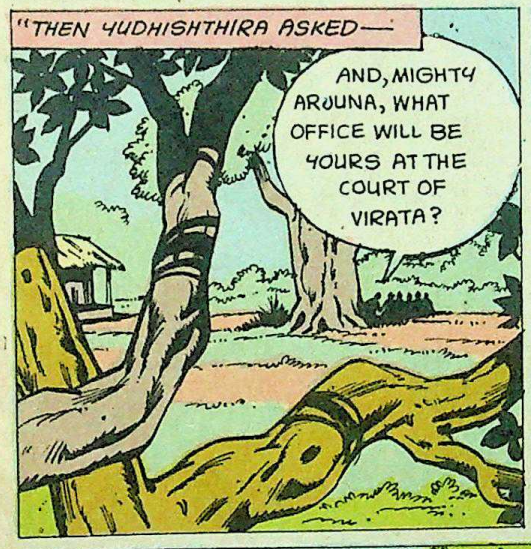

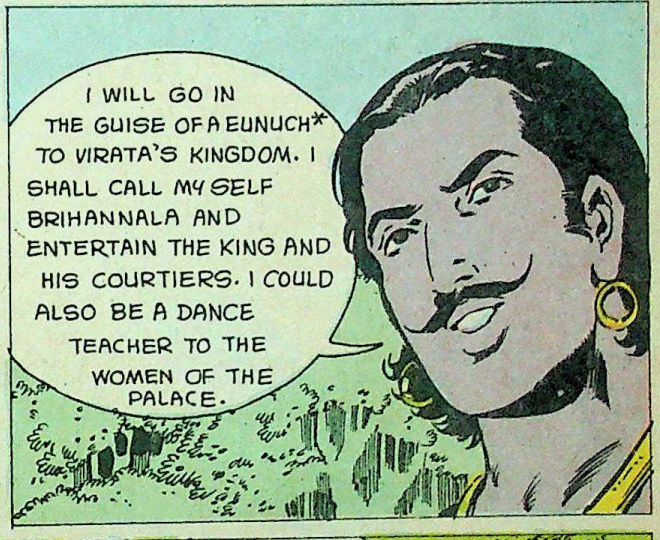

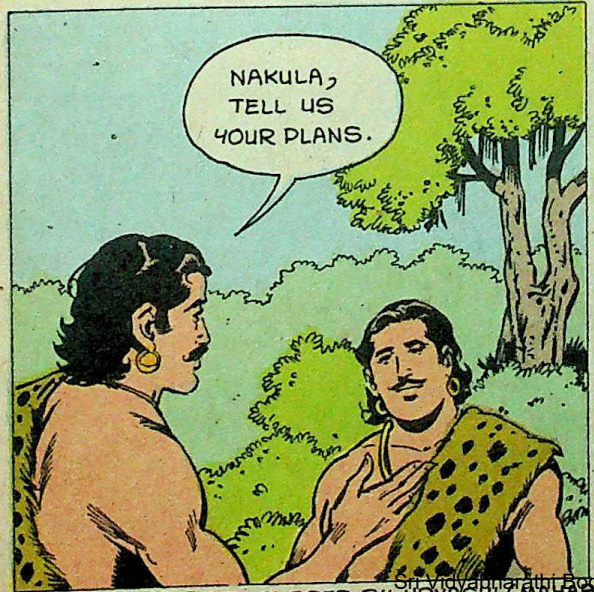

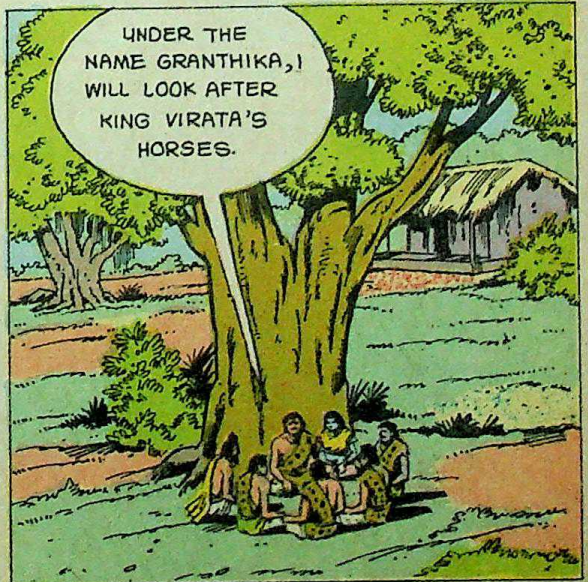

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*ARJUNA HAD BEEN CURSED BY URVASHI (MAHABHARATA—2) THAT HE WOULD HAVE TO LIVE BEREFT OF MANHOOD.

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"AND SAHADEVA SAID—

SINCE I AM SKILLED AT MILKING AND TAMING COWS, I WILL LOOK AFTER THE ROYAL HERD. I SHALL CALL MYSELF TANTIPALA.

TURNING TO DRAUPADI, YUDHISHTHIRA SAID—

AND OUR BELOVED WIFE DRAUPADI, HOW AND WHERE WILL YOU LIVE?

"DRAUPADI REPLIED—

MY LORD, THERE IS A CLASS OF VIRTUOUS WOMEN CALLED SAIRANDHRIS. I WILL DRESS AS A SAIRANDHRI AND SERVE KING VIRATA'S WIFE, SUDESHNA. NOBODY WILL RECOGNISE ME IN THAT GUISE.

O FAIR MAIDEN, YOU HAVE SPOKEN WELL. CONDUCT YOURSELF THERE IN SUCH A WAY THAT OUR ENEMIES NEVER RECOGNISE YOU.

" THEN YUDHISHTHIRA SAID—

WE HAVE DECIDED WHAT COURSE OF ACTION WE WILL BE TAKING. LET THE SAGES AND PRIESTS REPAIR TO THE ABODE OF DRUPADA AND MAINTAIN THE AGNIHOTRA FIRES. AND LET DRAUPADI'S MAID-SERVANTS GO TO THE PANCHALA KINGDOM. AND IF ASKED, ANSWER—WE DO NOT KNOW WHERE THE PANDAVAS HAVE GONE, AFTER LEAVING US AT DWAITAVANA.

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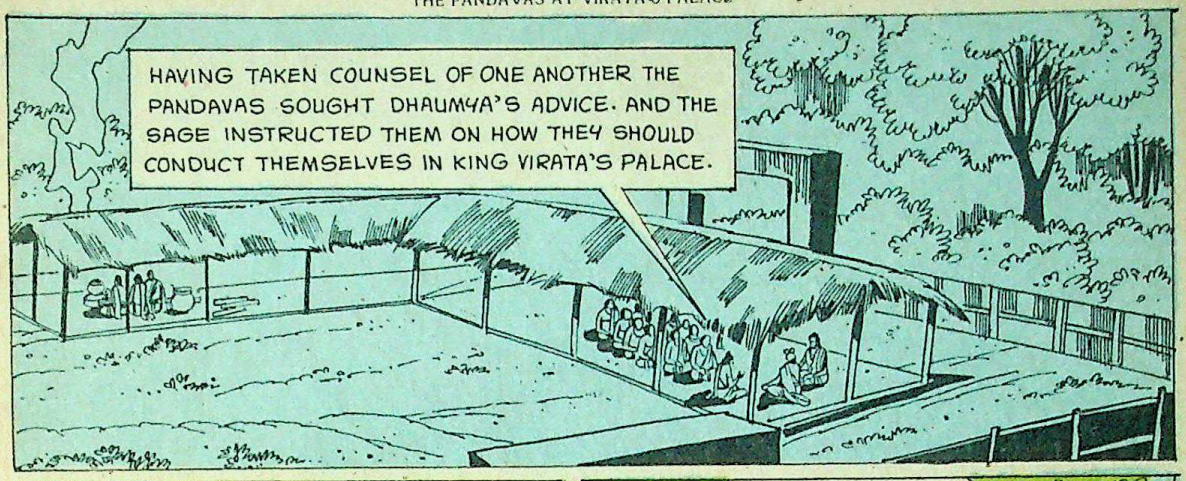

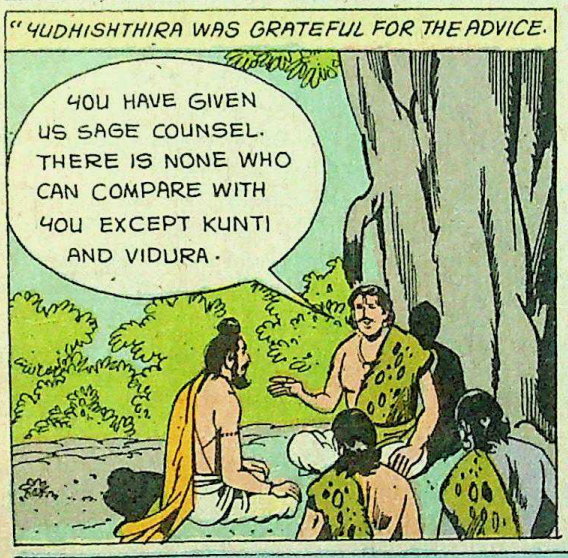

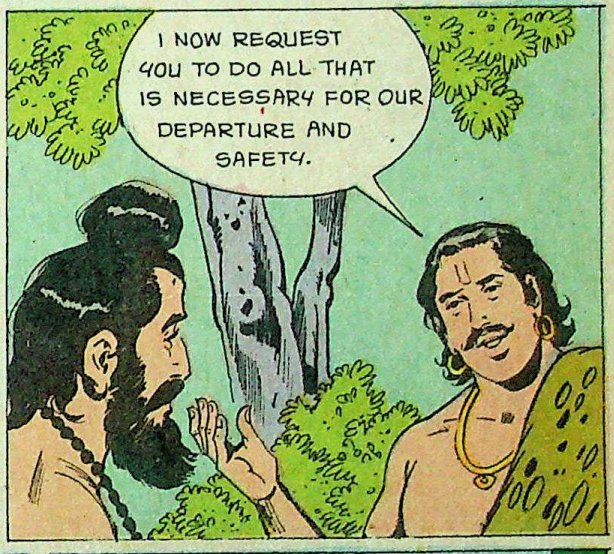

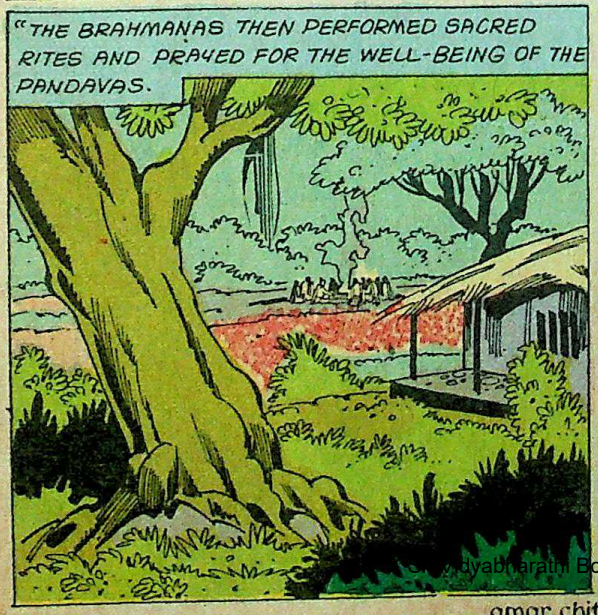

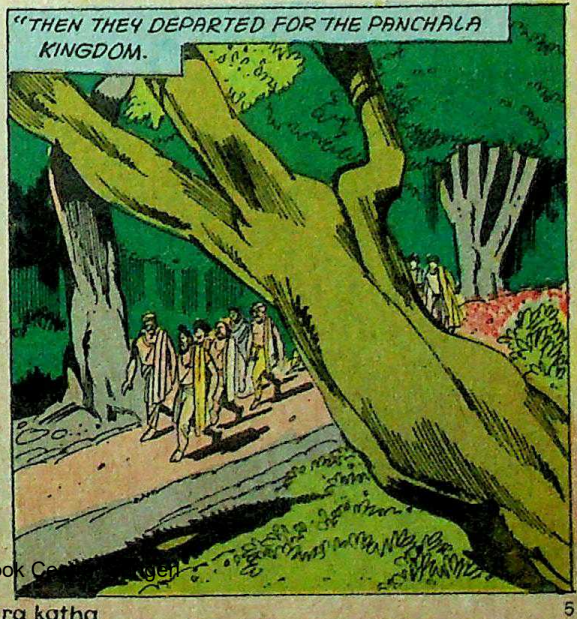

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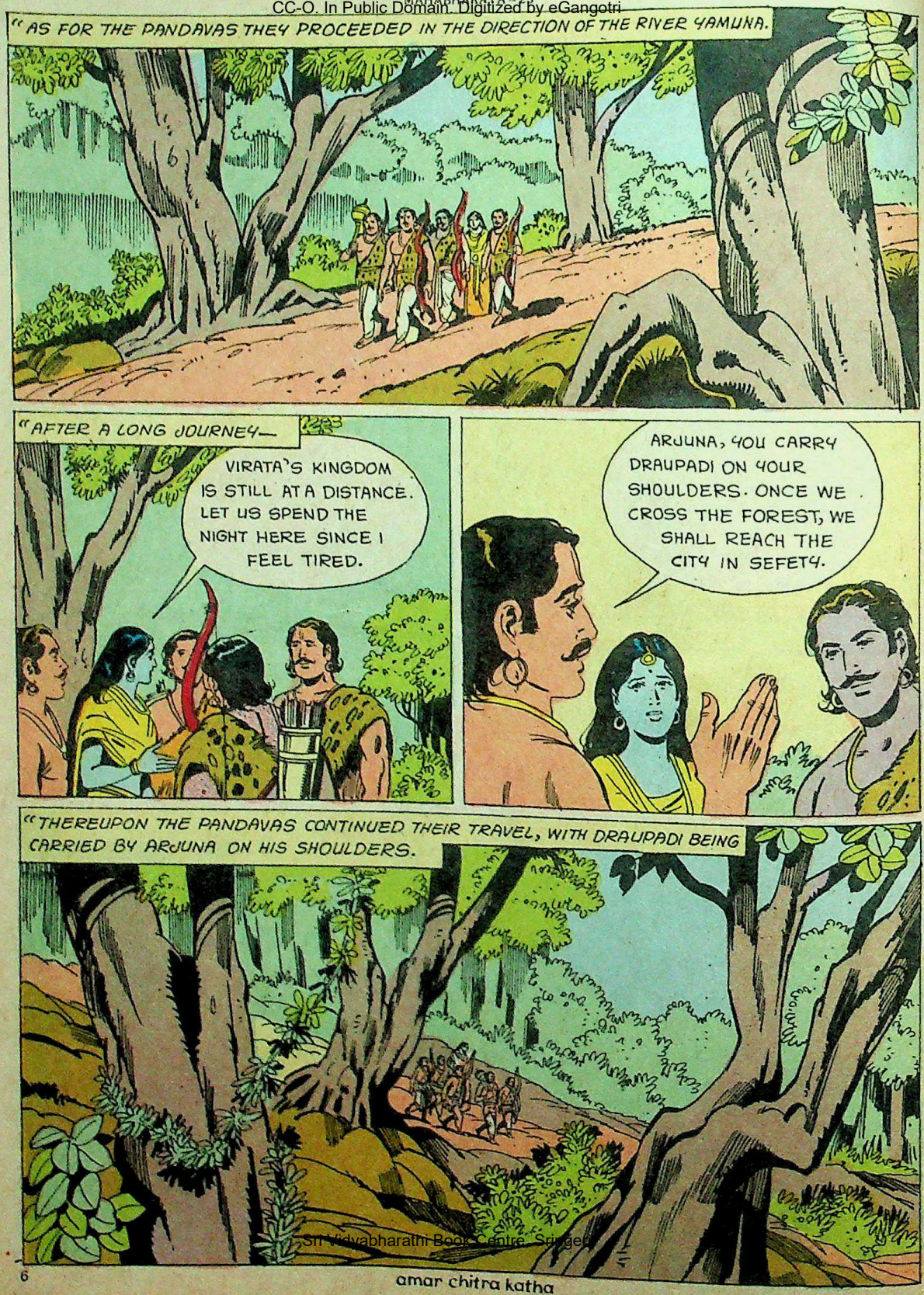

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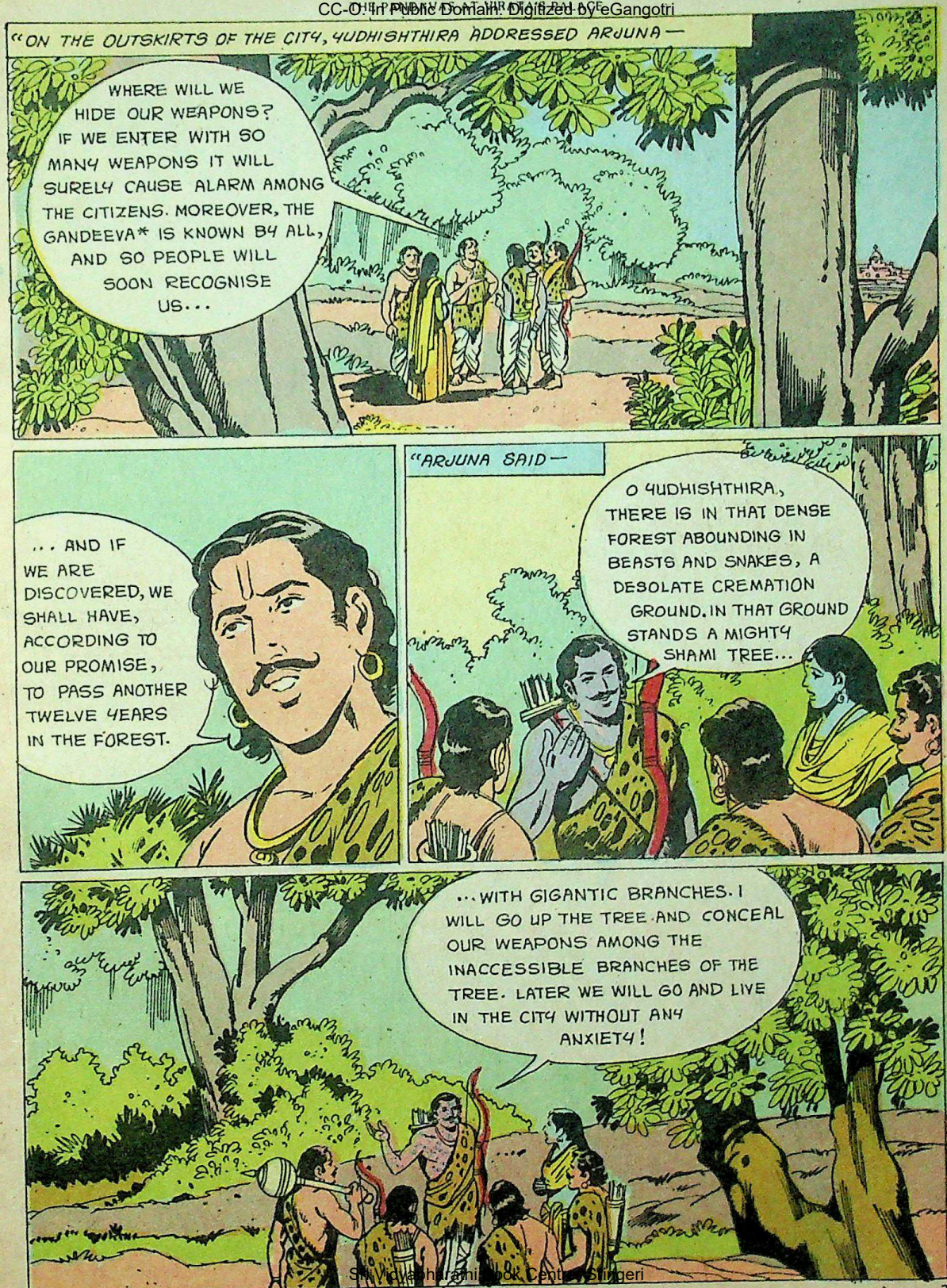

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* ARJUNA'S BOW

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THEREAFTER THE PANDAVAS DIVESTED THEMSELVES OF THEIR WEAPONS. THE MIGHTY CELESTIAL WEAPONS WERE GATHERED AND TAKEN TO THE CREMATION GROUND IN THE FOREST.

"NAKULA ASCENDED THE TREE AND SECURED THE WEAPONS TO THE BRANCHES WHICH WERE STRONG AND WHICH COULD RESIST RAIN AND WIND.

"THE PANDAVAS THEN HUNG FROM THE TREE A FOUL-SMELLING CARCASS TO DETER PEOPLE FROM APPROACHING THE TREE.

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"SATISFIED WITH THEIR WORK, THEY TURNED TOWARDS THE KINGDOM OF VIRATA.

"YUDHISHTHIRA'S MIND WAS FULL OF PRAISES OF THE GODDESS DURGA.

"HE AND HIS BROTHERS TOGETHER WITH DRAUPADI, DESIROUS OF OBTAINING A VISION OF THE GODDESS, INVOKED HER BY RECITING VARIOUS HYMNS.

O MOTHER, GRANT ME PROTECTION.

"PRAISED BY THE SONS OF PANDU, THE GODDESS APPEARED BEFORE THEM.

O MIGHTY KING, THROUGH MY GRACE YOU SHALL SLAY THE KAURAVAS AND VICTORY SHALL BE YOURS.

YOU SHALL RULE OVER THE EARTH ONCE MORE AND JOY AND HEALTH WILL BE YOURS. AND THROUGH MY GRACE NEITHER THE KURU SPIES NOR THOSE THAT DWELL IN THE COUNTRY OF THE MATSYAS WILL SUCCEED IN RECOGNISING YOU ALL AS LONG AS YOU RESIDE IN VIRATA'S CITY.

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AFTER THIS, THE PANDAVAS WENT IN DIFFERENT DIRECTIONS, EACH TO TAKE UP HIS NEW SERVICE FOR THE PERIOD OF ONE YEAR.

"YUDHISHTHIRA WRAPPED HIS DICE OF GOLD IN A PIECE OF CLOTH AND PROCEEDED TOWARDS THE COURT OF VIRATA.

"AT THE COURT, KING VIRATA WAS VERY IMPRESSED BY YUDHISHTHIRA'S APPEARANCE.

ENQUIRE WHO THAT MAN IS. HE CANNOT BE A BRAHMANA. HIS PROUD AND CONFIDENT BEARING SUGGESTS THAT HE IS SOME KING.

"WHILE VIRATA WAS TALKING TO HIS MINISTER, YUDHISHTHIRA APPROACHED HIM—

O MIGHTY KING, I AM A POOR BRAHMANA WHO WISHES TO SEEK SHELTER IN YOUR ABODE. I WISH TO LIVE HERE UNDER YOUR GUIDANCE AND PROTECTION.

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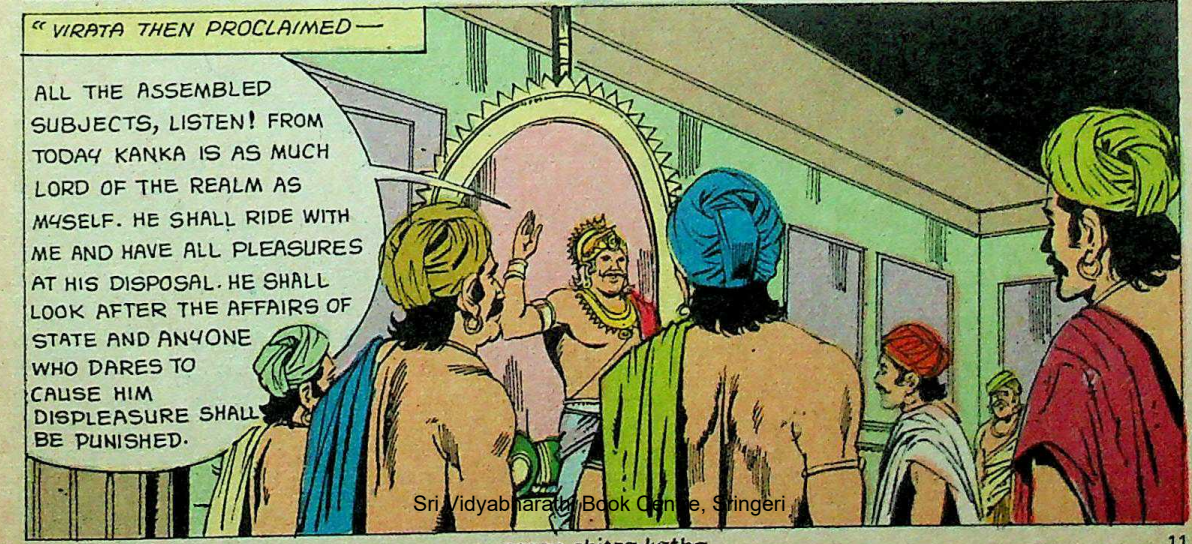

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"WHILE THE BROTHERS WERE SEEKING EMPLOYMENT WITH THE KING, DRAUPADI WANDERED THE STREETS OF THE CITY, WEARING A HARASSED LOOK.

WHO ARE YOU?

WHAT DO YOU SEEK?

"SHE REPLIED —

I AM A KING'S SAIRANDHRI. I WISH TO SERVE ANYONE WHO WILL MAINTAIN ME.

"BUT PEOPLE TURNED AWAY —

SHE IS TOO BEAUTIFUL TO BE A MAID.

HER SPEECH SUGGESTS SHE IS FROM A ROYAL FAMILY.

"SOON DRAUPADI PASSED THE PALACE OF KING VIRATA'S FAVOURITE QUEEN SUDESHNA. THE QUEEN WAS ON THE TERRACE WHEN SHE BEHELD A FORLORN MAID ON THE STREETS. SHE ADDRESSED HER —

O BEAUTIFUL ONE, WHO ARE YOU? AND WHAT DO YOU SEEK?

I AM A SAIRANDHRI, O QUEEN. I WILL SERVE ANYBODY WHO WILL MAINTAIN ME.

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*LITERALLY MEANS MAKER OF GARLANDS.

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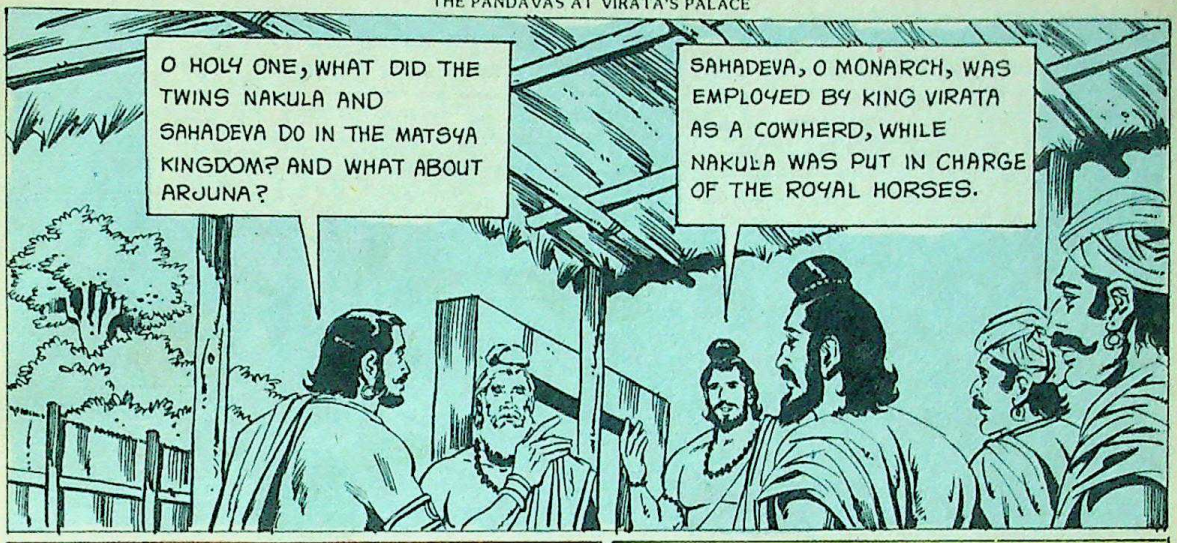

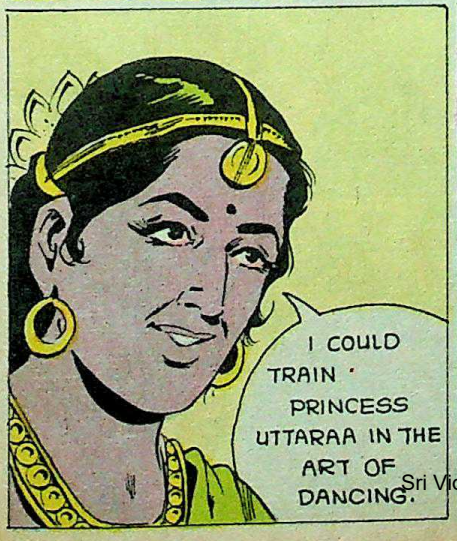

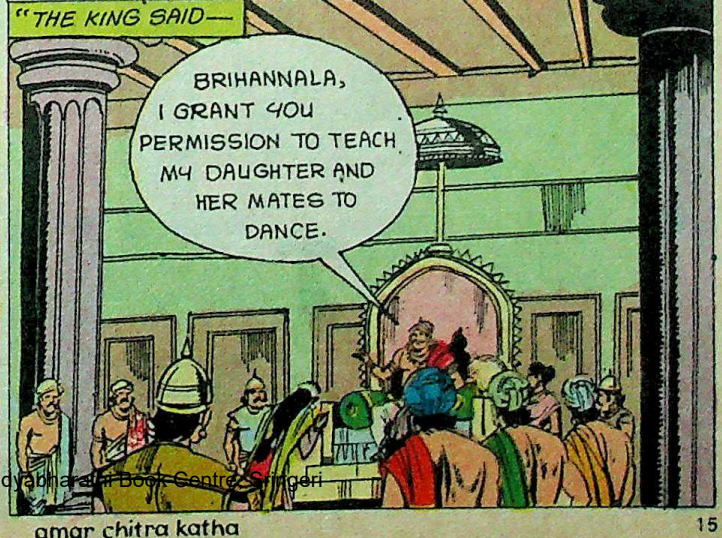

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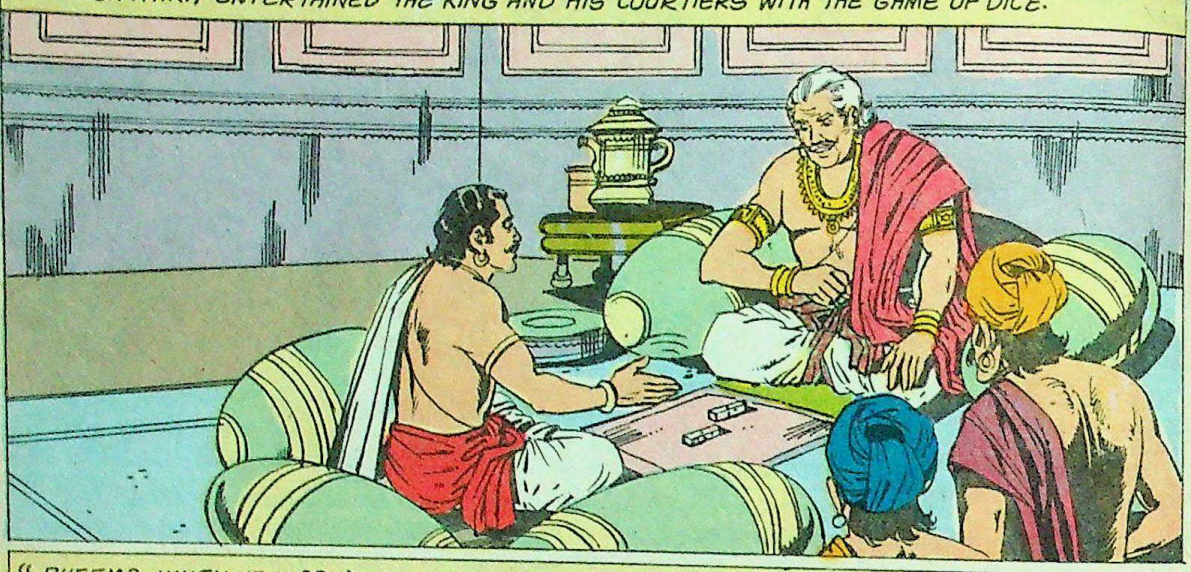
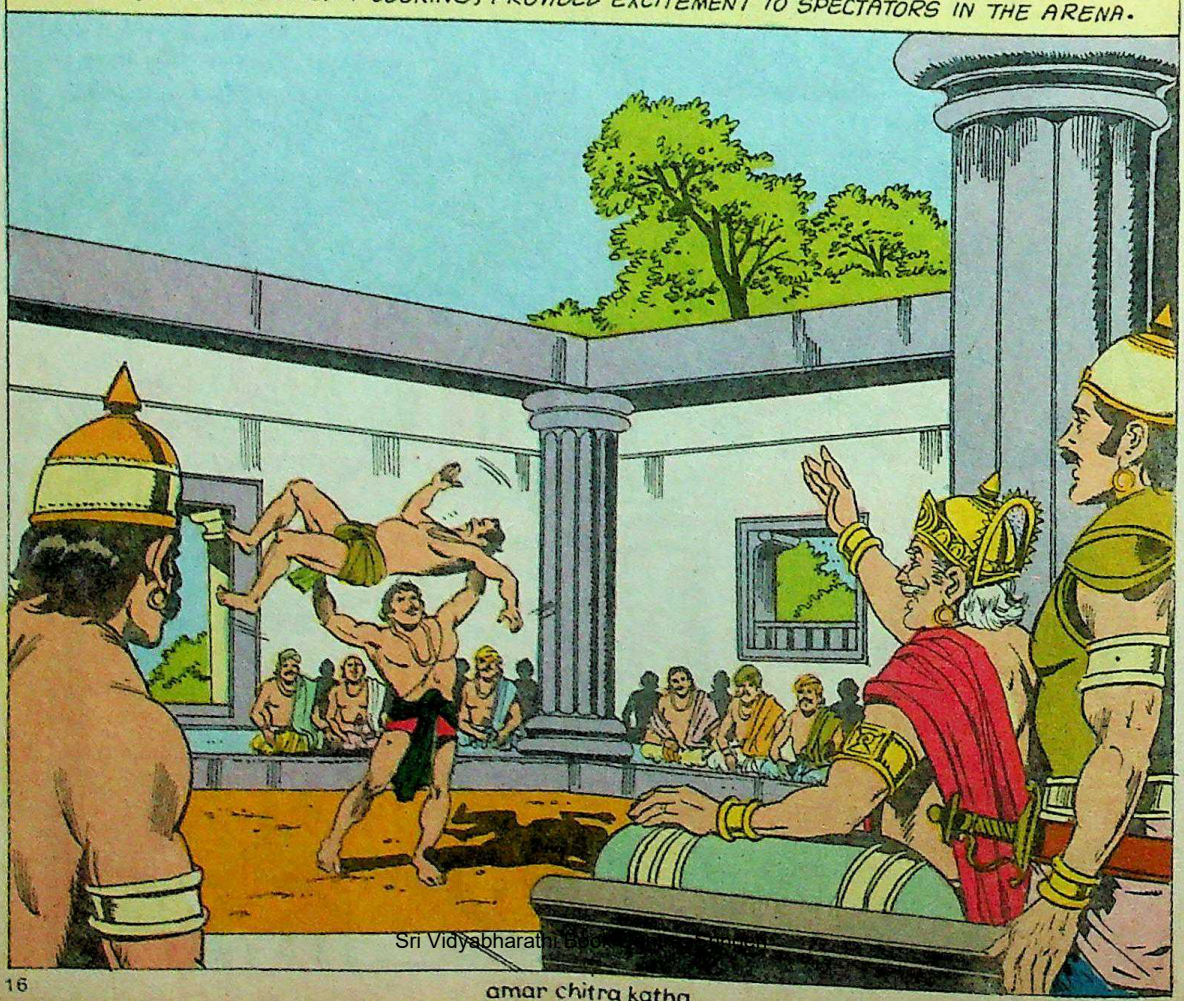
"LIVING IN DISGUISE, THE PANDAVAS PERFORMED THE DUTIES ASSIGNED TO THEM. THUS YUDHISHTHIRA ENTERTAINED THE KING AND HIS COURTIERS WITH THE GAME OF DICE.



"BHEEMA, WHEN HE WASN'T COOKING, PROVIDED EXCITEMENT TO SPECTATORS IN THE ARENA.



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"ARJUNA TRAINED THE YOUNG MAIDENS TO ENTERTAIN THE KING WITH THEIR SINGING AND DANCING.

"KING VIRATA WAS PLEASED TO SEE HIS HORSES SO WELL-TRAINED AND REWARDED NAKULA WITH AMPLE GIFTS.

"AND WHEN THE KING BEHELD AROUND SAHADEVA A HERD OF WELL-TRAINED BULLOCKS, HE BESTOWED UPON HIM WEALTH OF A DIVERSE KIND.

"BUT DRAUPADI WAS AFFLICTED WITH GREAT SORROW ON SEEING THE MIGHTY PANDAVAS REDUCED TO SUCH A LOW STATUS.

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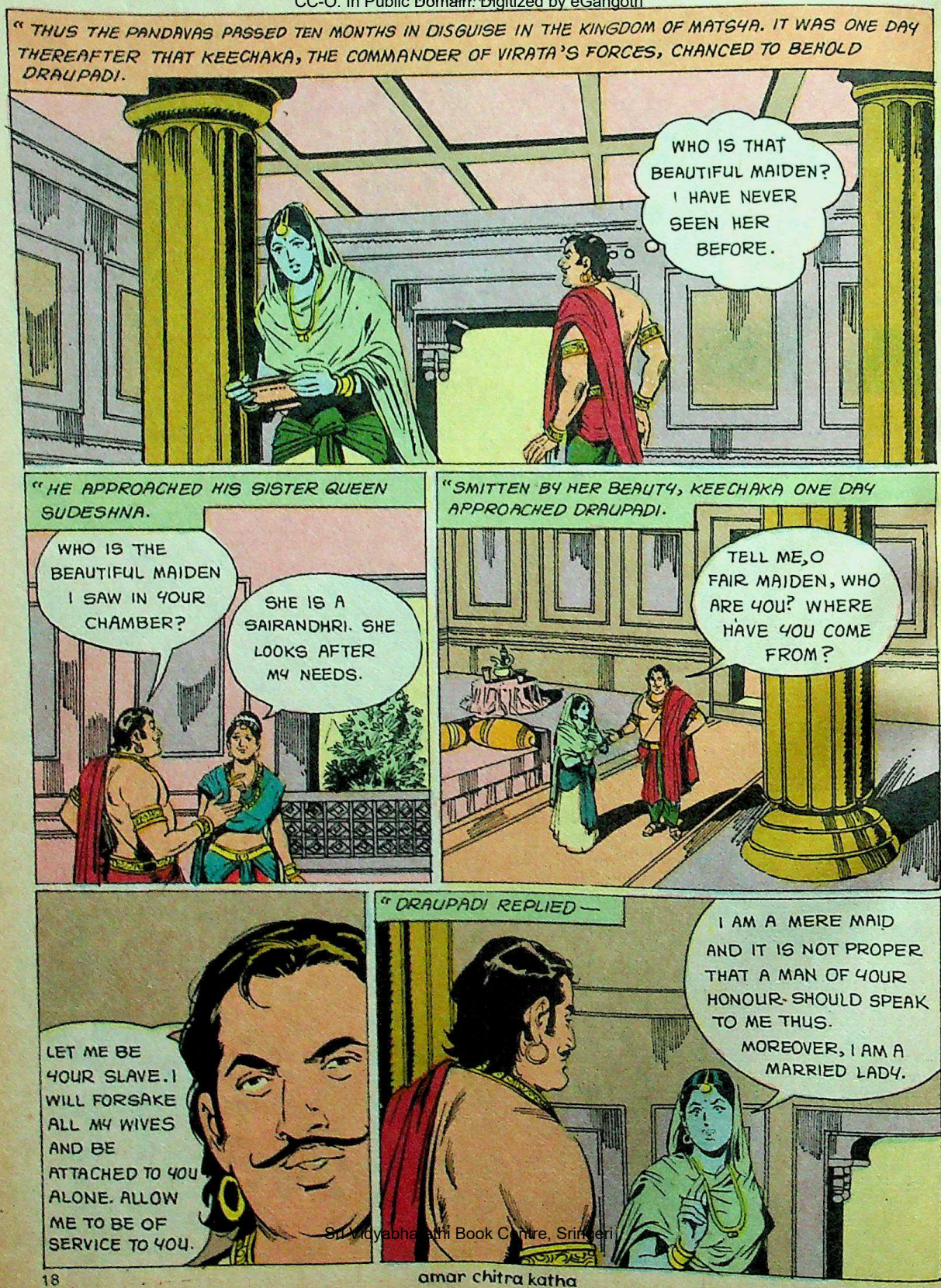

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"BUT THIS DID NOT DAMPEN KEECHAKA'S ARDOUR.

LADY, DO NOT DISREGARD ME. I AM THE REAL LORD OF THIS KINGDOM. THERE IS NOT ANOTHER MAN ON EARTH TO RIVAL ME.

IF YOU ACCEPT MY OFFER YOU CAN ENJOY THE BEST OF WORLDLY PLEASURES.

BEWARE, I AM DEAR TO MY FIVE GANDHARVA HUSBANDS. AND IF THEY ARE ENRAGED THEY WILL KILL YOU. THEN EVEN IF YOU CONCEAL YOURSELF INSIDE THE EARTH OR ESCAPE SOARING INTO THE SKY THERE WILL BE NO ESCAPE FROM THE ANGER OF THESE MIGHTY GANDHARVAS.

"KEECHAKA THEN WENT TO HIS SISTER AND SPOKE TO HER THUS—

O SUDESHNA, I CANNOT LIVE WITHOUT YOUR SAIRANDHRI. PLEASE DEVISE A MEANS SO THAT SHE WILL COME TO ME.

DEAR BROTHER, THE SAIRANDHRI IS UNDER MY PROTECTION AND IT DOES NOT BEHOVE ME TO BETRAY HER. AND IT WOULD BE FOR YOUR OWN GOOD TO LEAVE HER ALONE, OR ELSE HER MIGHTY GANDHARVA HUSBANDS WILL KILL YOU.

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"AFTER A LOT OF PERSUASION, SUDESHNA FINALLY GAVE IN.

I SHALL SEND MY SAIRANDHRI TO YOUR CHAMBER ON SOME PRETEXT. YOU CAN HUMOUR HER THERE, FREE FROM INTERRUPTION.

"WHEN KEECHAKA LEFT, SUDESHNA CALLED DRAUPADI.

GO TO KEECHAKA'S CHAMBER AND GET ME SOME WINE. I AM VERY THIRSTY.

"DRAUPADI WAS FRIGHTENED—

O QUEEN, DO NOT SEND ME ON ANY ERRAND TO KEECHAKA. HE IS SURE TO MOLEST ME. YOU HAVE MANY OTHER MAIDS. SEND ONE OF THEM.

DO NOT FEAR. SENT BY ME, HE WILL NOT DARE TO HARM YOU.

THE HELPLESS DRAUPADI THEN PRAYED TO SURYA FOR PROTECTION. AND SURYA COMMANDED A RAKSHASA TO PROTECT HER INVISIBLY, ALL THE TIME.

"IN KEECHAKA'S CHAMBER, DRAUPADI STOOD TREMBLING BEFORE HIM.

WELCOME, O BEAUTIFUL SAIRANDHRI. COME, SIT BY ME AND DRINK SOME WINE.

THE QUEEN HAS SENT ME TO YOU FOR SOME WINE.

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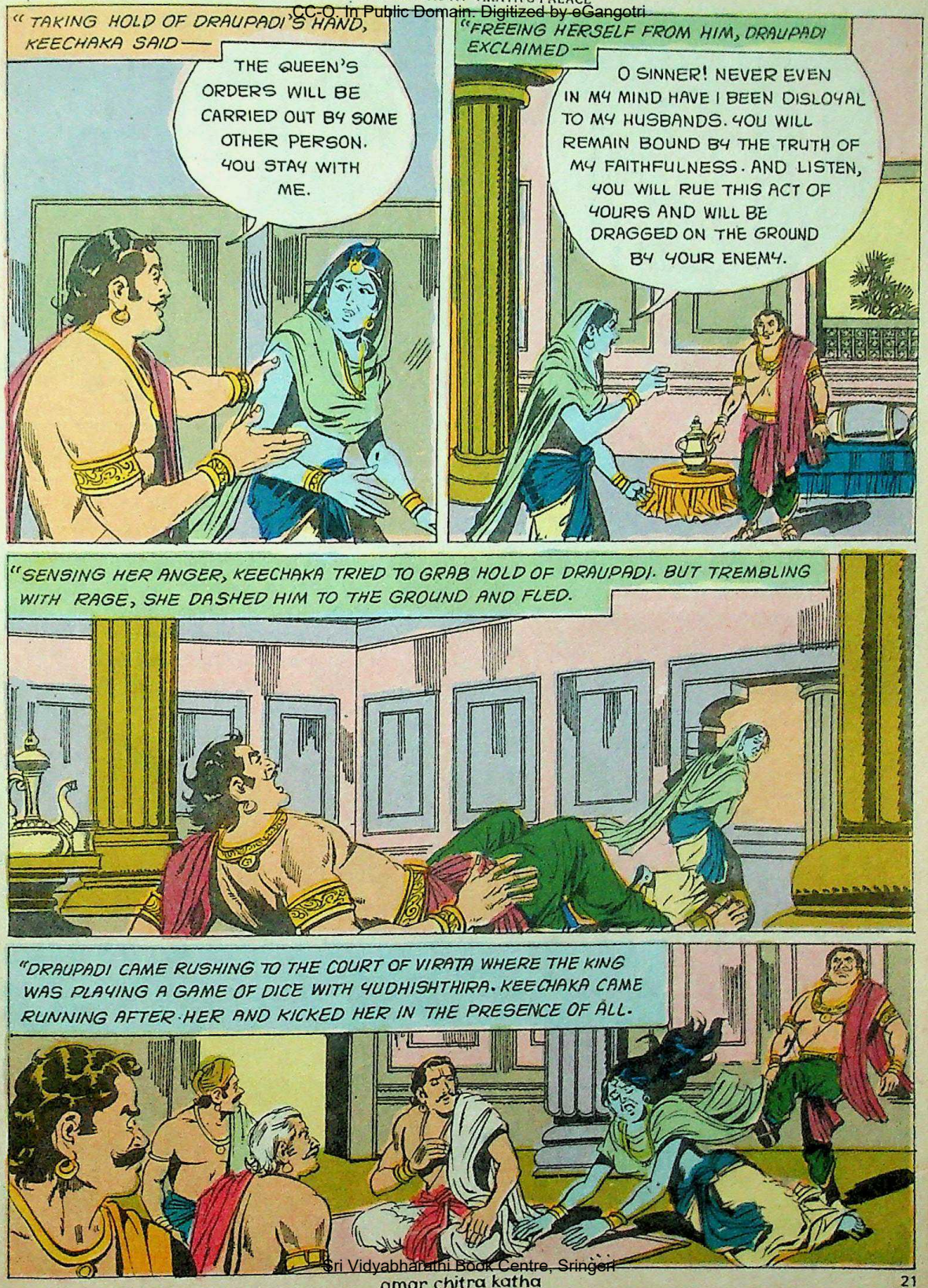

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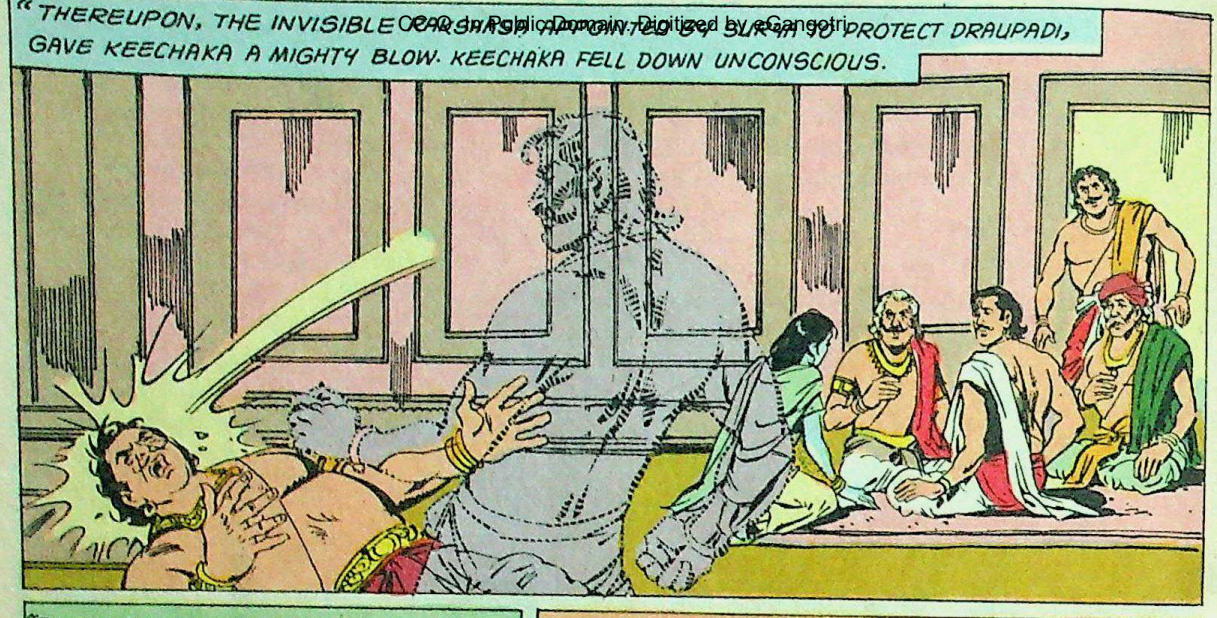

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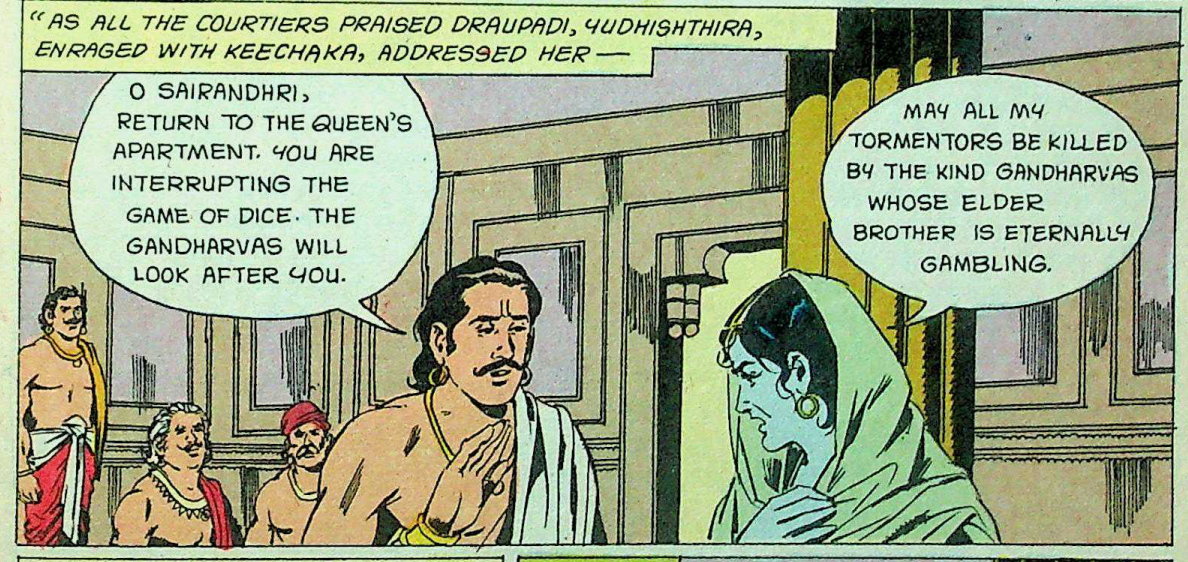

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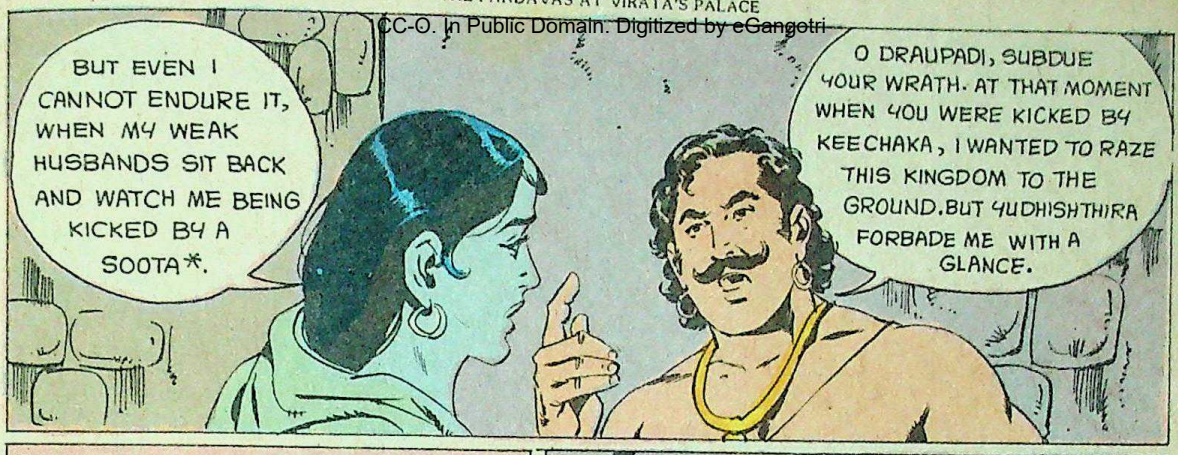

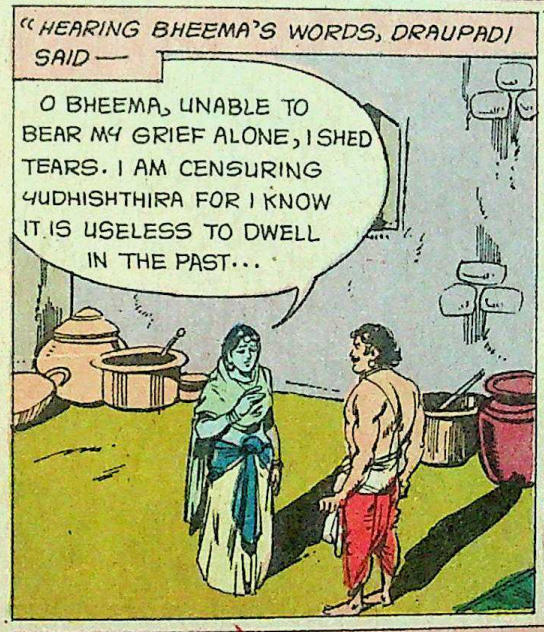

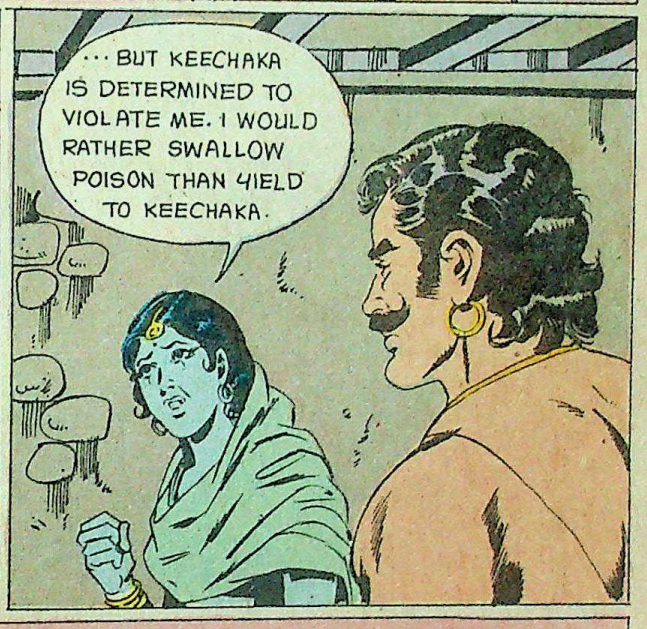

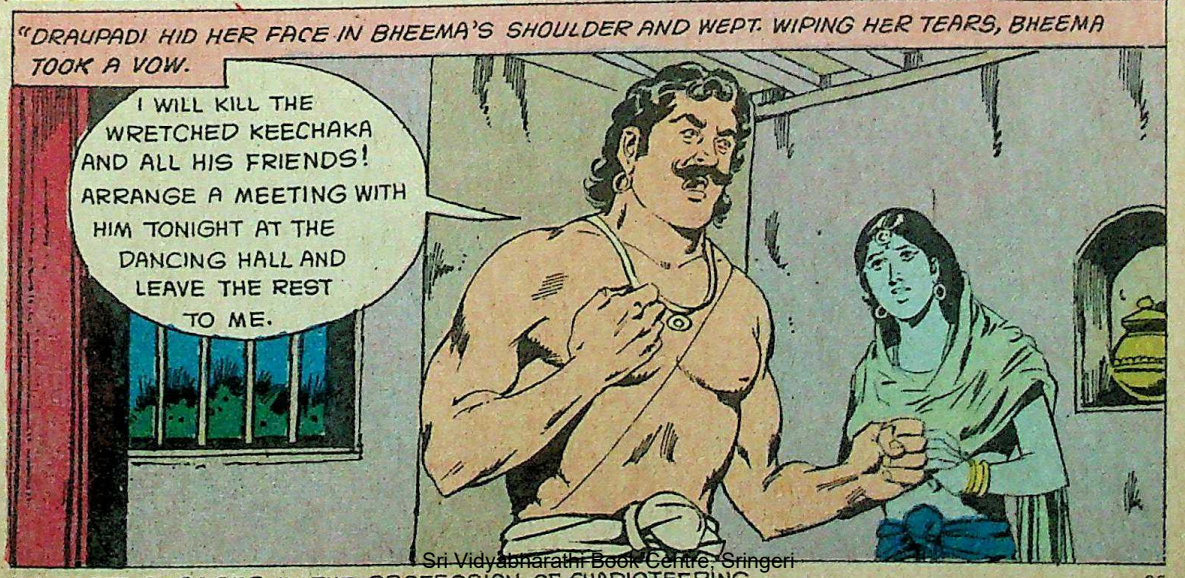

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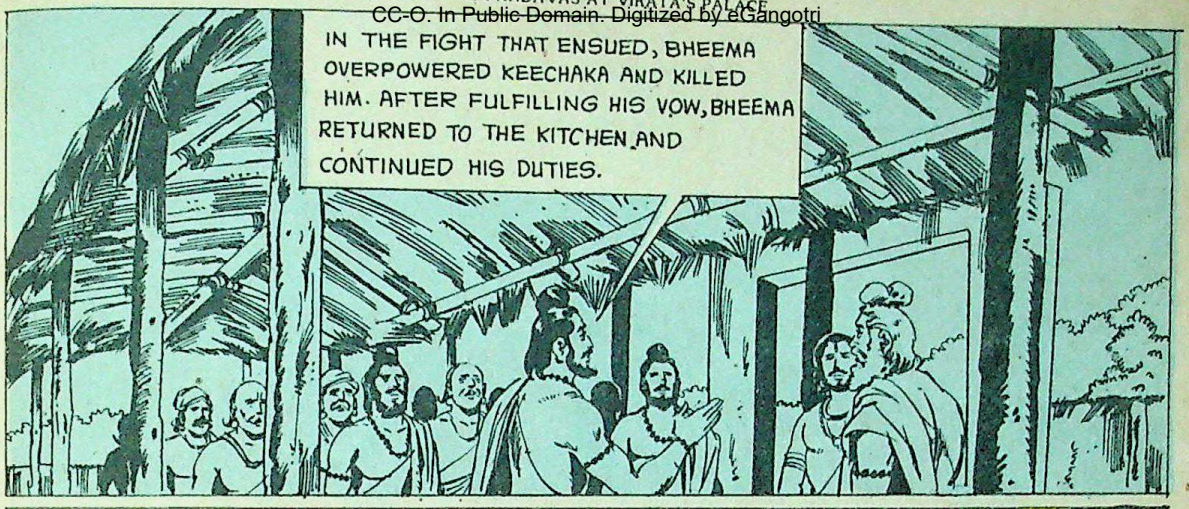

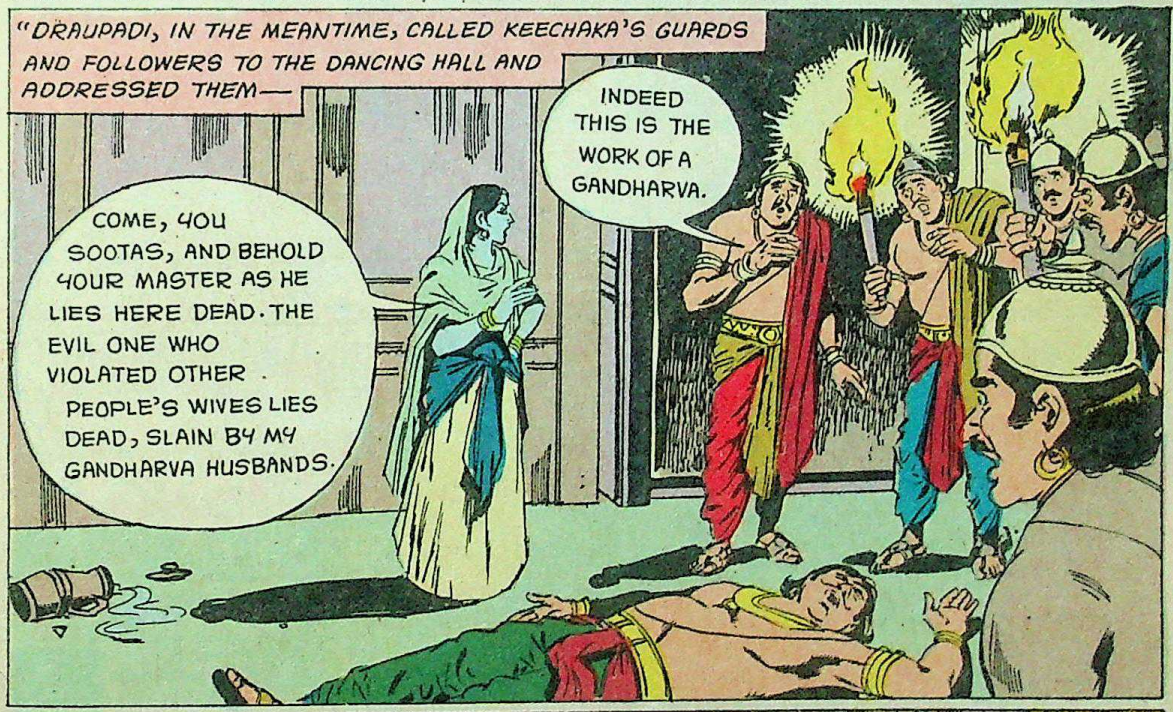

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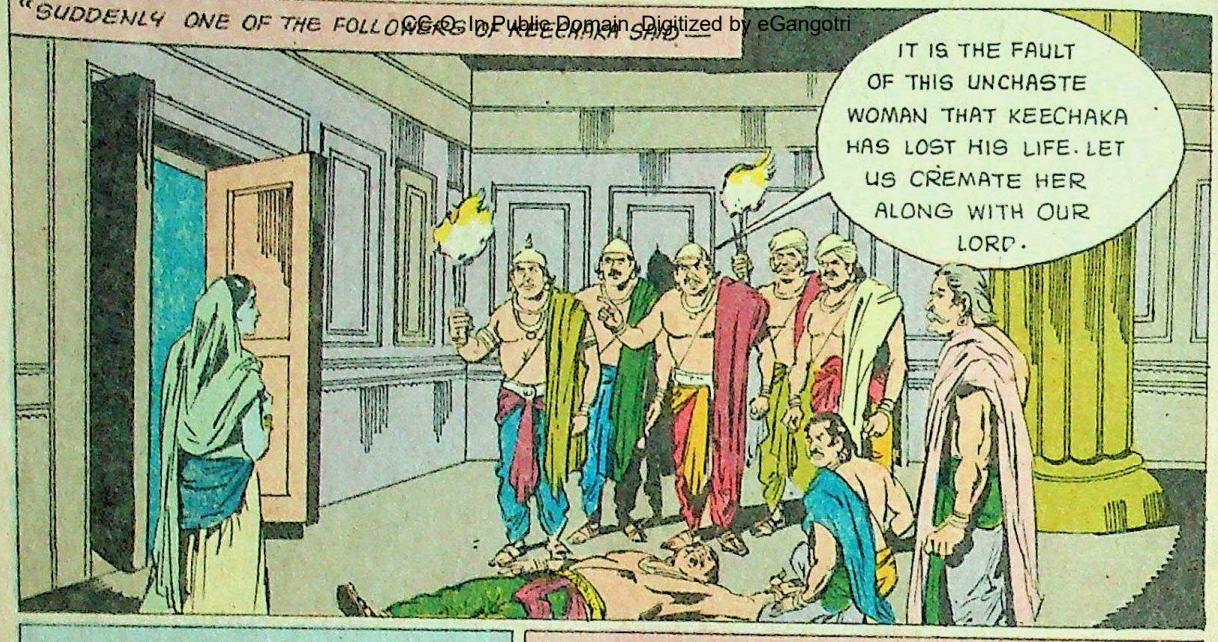

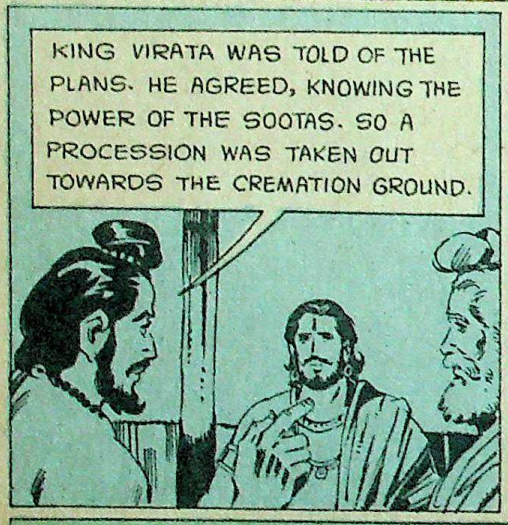

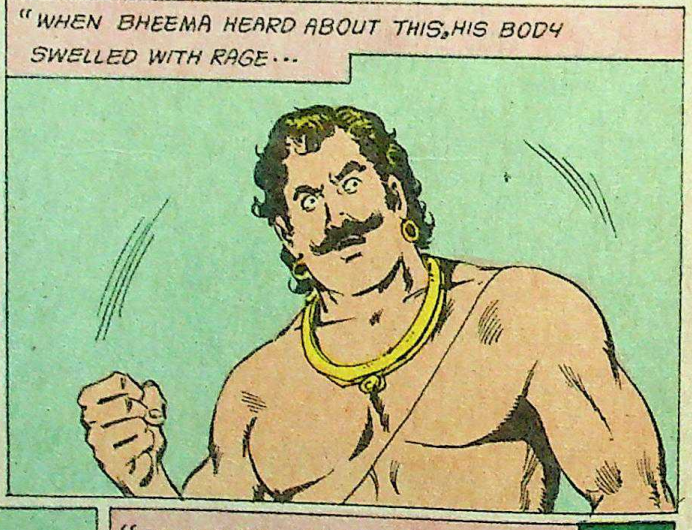

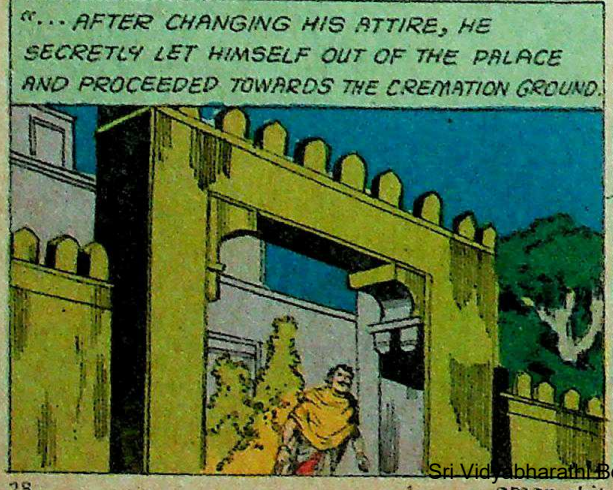

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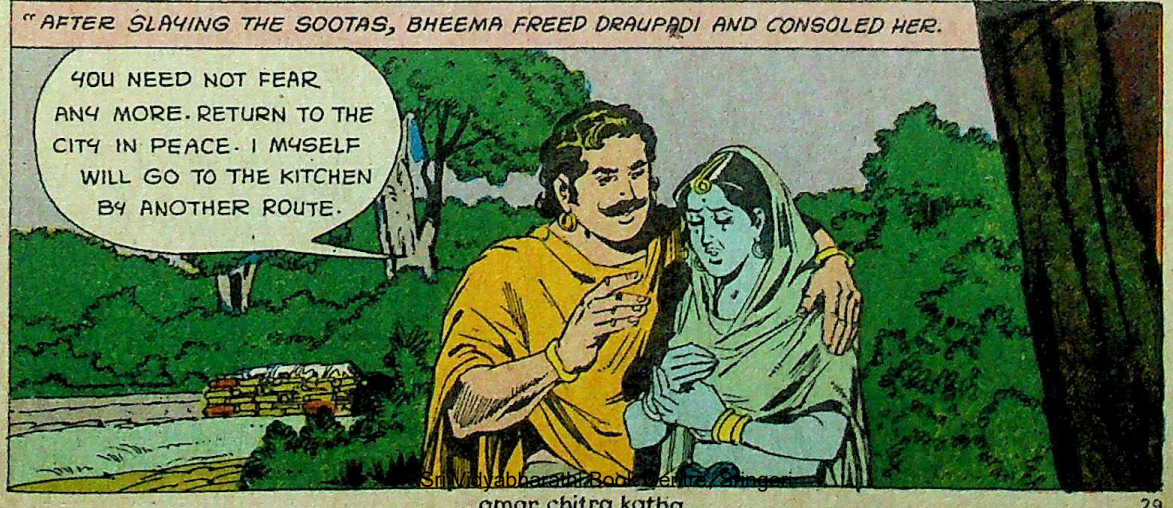

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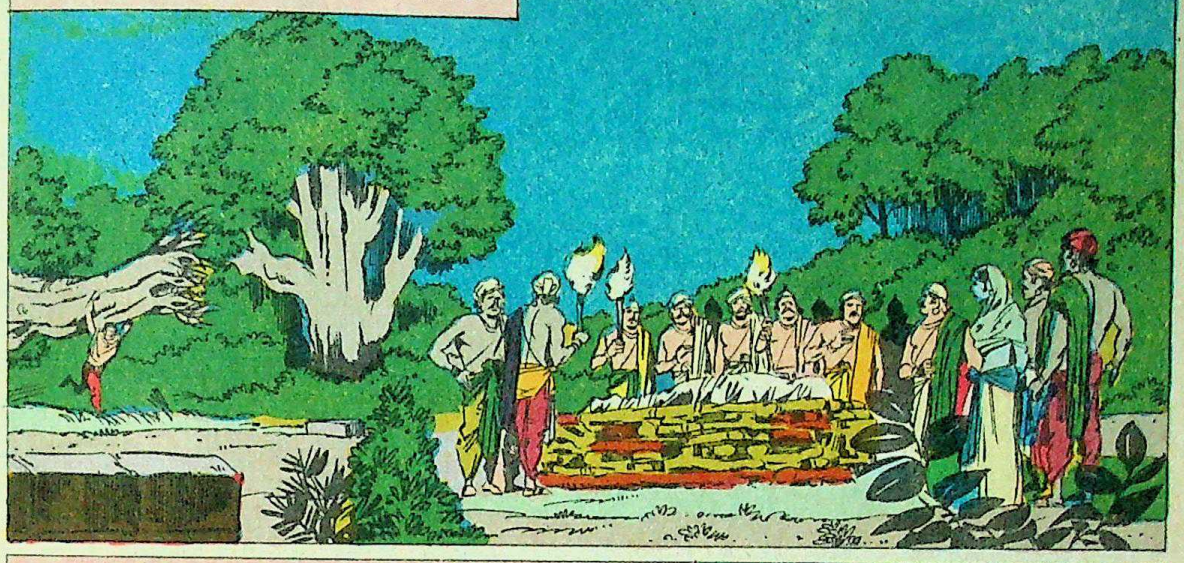
"AT THE CREMATION GROUND BHEEMA RUSHED TOWARDS THE SOOTAS WITH THE TREE TRUNK IN HIS HANDS.



"THE SOOTAS RAN HELTER-SKELTER, SCREAMING.

THE MIGHTY GANDHARVA HAS COME FILLED WITH RAGE. HE WILL KILL US. RUN FOR YOUR LIVES.

SET THE SAIRANDHRI FREE. SET HER FREE.

"AFTER SLAYING THE SOOTAS, BHEEMA FREED DRAUPADI AND CONSOLED HER.

YOU NEED NOT FEAR ANY MORE. RETURN TO THE CITY IN PEACE. I MYSELF WILL GO TO THE KITCHEN BY ANOTHER ROUTE.

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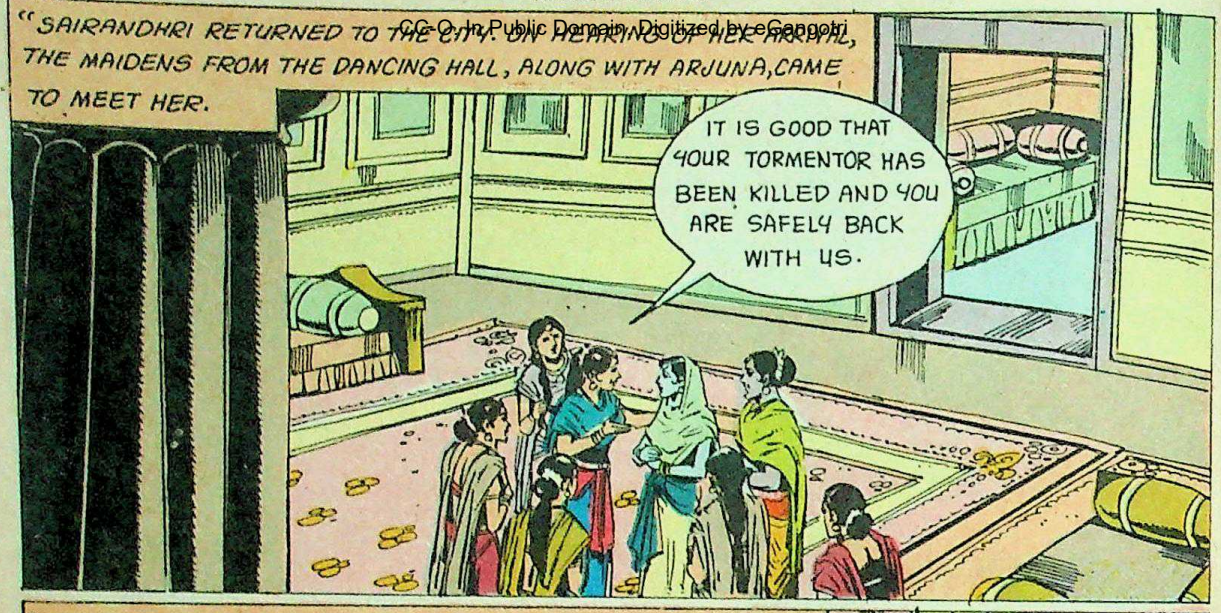

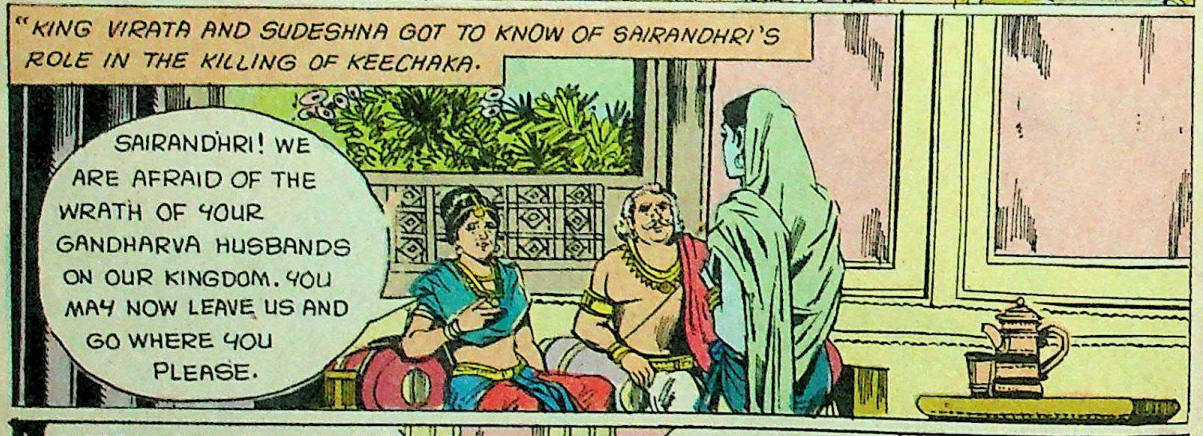

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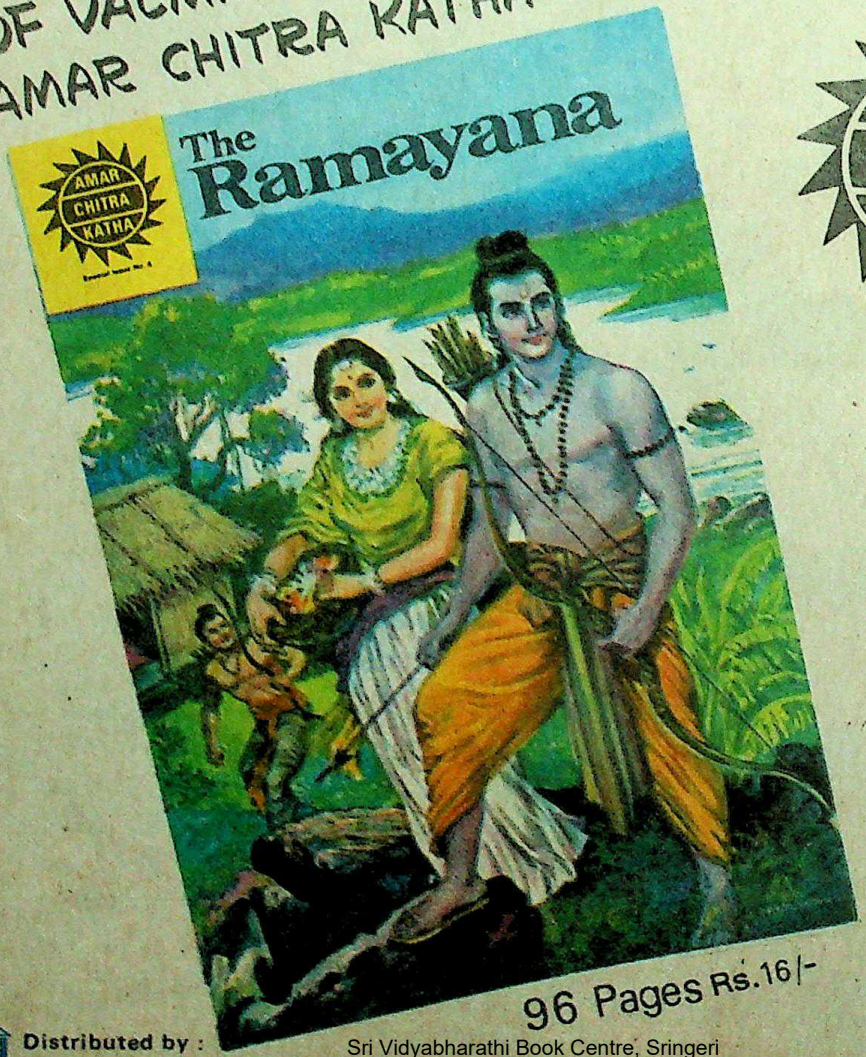

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